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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2008

In Today's Papers

President Gul Expected to Visit Yerevan

All papers gave extensive coverage to the developments regarding President Gul's potential trip to Armenia for the September 6th soccer match between the Turkish and Armenian national teams. Mainstream Hurriyet reported the final decision will be reached after MFA Deputy Undersecretary Unal Cevikoz returns from Yerevan. "Security, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and the genocide claims are the main issues of concern to Ankara," Hurriyet added. While columnists from mainstream as well as Islamist leaning dailies supported Gul to go to a larger extent, Turkish business circles also gave similar support. Turkey's business group TUSIAD issued a statement and urged President Gul to use 'this historic opportunity.' Papers also drew attention to the comments from Turkish national team coach Fatih Terim, who told a press conference in Istanbul, "Football is an activity which brings nations closer, and political problems should be left off the pitch. We are going there to play football, not to make a war."

Meanwhile, the ruling opposition party AKP leaders asked its parliamentarians not to travel to Yerevan for the game, papers reported. Milliyet, Radikal and Hurriyet noted that the decision was taken in order not to face criticism from opposition parties.

Editorial Commentary on Turkey-Armenia

Cuneyt Ulsever commented in mainstream Hurriyet: "A Caucasus Platform involving Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan may now be a distant dream. However the platform effort itself is very important to pursue because it creates a dialogue mechanism while minimizing foreign intervention. Armenia should not be excluded from the Caucasus Platform. Otherwise the territorial integrity of Armenia will be at stake too. Turkey should align with Armenia against Moscow's efforts at direct influence over Yerevan. Also, this would prevent the declaration of Karabakh's independence in the midst of all this turmoil. Given all of these facts, President Gul's trip to Yerevan is even more important."

Cengiz Candar wrote in both the business daily Referans and liberal-intellectual Radikal: "President Gul's trip to Yerevan will be a giant step toward the future. I don't think he will, but I wish during his visit he could go to the 'Genocide Monument' in Yerevan and pay his respects. Such a gesture would elevate Turkey's position rapidly before international community. And such a gesture has nothing to do with recognition of genocide. It only means 'I am aware of the tragic memories from our common history. I am here to show my respect to the human agony.' I wish he was able to make this gesture."

Abdullah Muratoglu wrote in Islamist leaning Yeni Safak: "President Gul's trip to Yerevan will likely cause a positive impact on this new phase of bilateral ties. Let's hope that Yerevan will not turn down Turkey's peace-seeking hand. Had Yerevan acted wisely some 15 years ago, there would be enormous benefits for Armenia. For instance, we would have Baku-Yerevan-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and the 1915 events could have been limited to an acceptable frame. Armenia lost all of those chances. In any case Turkey should continue to do whatever is necessary for peace."

Sami Kohen commented in mainstream Milliyet: "The September 6th soccer game between Turkey and Armenia is an historic opportunity to invigorate the weak relationship between Turkey and Armenia. Now, some circles are criticizing Gul's possible visit to Armenia before our bilateral problems are solved. However, the only way to resolve problems is to meet and talk. This visit will serve Azerbaijan's benefit as well because Turkish diplomacy will support Azeri rights within the Caucasus' crises. No one should expect any concrete and sparkling results from this visit. If this gesture can start a new

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process, even that should be considered as success."

Ergun Babahan wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Recent Turkish foreign policy is based on good relations with all its neighbors. Active foreign policy has been pursued from Greece to Iran to Syria. The only exception to this policy is Armenia. Turkey has been unable to improve relations with Armenia because of Armenia's foreign policy, the Diaspora's stance and Azerbaijan's uneasiness. The soccer game is an opportunity to start a new era in Turkey's relationship with Armenia. President Gul's visit to Armenia will be a good will gesture and that is why I believe that his visit to Armenia will be the right decision."

Gungor Mengi wrote in mainstream Vatan: "Regardless of speculations, President Gul should go to Armenia. Turkey may not benefit from this visit but if it is cancelled, Turkey will be left in a bad position which is against its role in the region as a peacemaker. The only way to end conflicts is to create channels for discussions. Gul should not waste the opportunity to attend this football game."

Cuneyt Arcayurek wrote in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "What will Turkey gain from President Gul visiting Armenia? Will this visit prove to be a step forward which might cause Armenia to withdraw forces from Upper Karabakh? PM Erdogan does not expect much from a visit which is not expected to bring concrete results. Erdogan has made it clear that he doesn't think like Gul because he prohibited AKP lawmakers from traveling to Yerevan for the game."

Mustafa Unal wrote in Islamist leaning Zaman: "President Gul's decision to visit Yerevan overlaps with the AKP policies. PM Erdogan approves of Gul's effort. Objections might be raised against Gul visiting Armenia, but the arguments put forth by the opposition CHP and MHP were far from convincing. Establishing ties with Armenia is important for the sake of regional stability. The communication channels between the two countries must be opened in order to find a resolution to our problems. Turkey has been a good regional example by favoring solutions on Cyprus. Gul's acceptance of Sarkhisian's invitation will put Turkey one step ahead in the international arena."

Lavrov and Babacan's 'Diplomatic Duel'
Media outlets report Foreign Minister Ali Babacan met Tuesday with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Istanbul. In a joint news

briefing following the talks, Babacan stressed stability and security in the Caucasus was "vitally important" to all countries of the region. He said both Turkey and Russia agreed that the Caucasus Platform initiative was aimed at boosting trust among regional countries. Mainstream Milliyet reports, "Lavrov denied secret missile sales to Iran," and "called for an international police force to secure peace in the Caucasus." Meanwhile, mainstream Sabah notes Babacan responded to a question about Turkey and Russia's disagreement regarding Georgia's territorial integrity by saying, "Sometimes allies have different ideas on some topics." Liberal Radikal writes, "Turkey and Russia Say they are Friends, Despite Disagreements about the Territorial Integrity of Georgia." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet is more negative in, "For the Second Time, Russia Rejects Turkey's Caucasus Platform," and draws attention to Russia's demands, regarding who sits at the table, are met. Leftist Taraf carries the headline, "Diplomatic Duel," and notes "Lavrov implied Turkey may be sending weapons to Georgia," but "Babacan denied Turkey's involvement in arms shipments to Georgia." In addition, the paper notes, "Babacan defended Georgia's territorial integrity," while Lavrov "defended Russia's recognition of the breakaway republics."

Babacan also said the results of the first six months of the year show Russia is Turkey's leading foreign trade partner, particularly in energy. "We have a multi-faceted partnership. Over the past months of this year, the trade turnover between our countries

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amounted to 20 billion dollars; bilateral cooperation must be further developed," Babacan emphasized. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Babacan stated the customs crisis between the two countries would be resolved by the "spirit of flexibility and cooperation" Russia was expected to demonstrate. Lavrov said Russia wishes to continue trade and stressed that discrimination against Turkey was out of the question. On possible cuts in the supply of Russian natural gas to Turkey, Lavrov stressed that so far Russia never violated its energy deals with other countries. Economic-political Referans, however, believes Russia will not seek urgent solutions to the existing problems regarding customs. Turkish trucks have been stranded on the Russian border since the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Georgia.

Gul and Bush Discuss Regional Developments

Mainstream Milliyet reports President Bush and President Gul talked on the phone yesterday about the Caucasus Initiative, the Kirkuk problem and the ensuing talks in Cyprus. Mainstream Sabah notes "Gul requested support for the Caucasus Proposal in order to ensure long term security in the Caucasus," but Bush "had reservations" about the proposal because, "Bush finds Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia unacceptable." Meanwhile, mainstream Hurriyet writes Bush and Gul merely "discussed their views regarding regional developments."

Saban Disli Resigns from his Post in AKP

All papers report that AKP Deputy Chairman and Sakarya deputy Saban Disli resigned from all of his posts in the party. Earlier the main opposition party CHP documented that Disli took a \$1 million bribe to settle a land issue with the state offices in Silivri. Mainstream Milliyet reports that the AKP central executive board convened this week and many members of the board said that the document could harm the party even if Disli were innocent. Reportedly, PM Erdogan told Disli to choose between trade and politics. Disli resigned from his posts as the deputy chairman of the party and member of the executive board. However, he will continue to be an AKP parliamentarian. Liberal Radikal reports that Disli said that he resigned from his posts "to prevent further damage to the AKP because of the CHP's groundless claims." The CHP claimed that Disli's resignation from party leadership is not satisfactory, and he should be tried in a court of law. Mainstream Vatan notes that this is the first time that an executive member resigned from the AKP because of bribery allegations.

New Round of Talks in Cyprus

Mainstream Milliyet reports "Talat and Christofias will meet to draw up the road map to the September 11th discussions," where "The Turkish side wants guarantees that a new Cyprus Republic must be

established where the Turkish and Greek sides have equal political status." Mainstream Sabah reports "Christofias has partially accepted the Turkish demand for political equality," but "the dispute lies in who is the guarantor of the island," as, "The Turkish side wants Ankara as the guarantor, but the Greek side wants the EU as the guarantor." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak draws attention to the role of the U.N. in observing these talks.

Editorial Commentary on Cyprus

Halit Kakinc argued in mainstream Aksam: "Greek Cypriot leader Christofias addressed his people in a speech, saying, 'Get used to the idea of a Turkish president in Cyprus. We will not continue governing the Turks forever; we will share the administration in a rotating presidency.' Christofias was also tough on a bishop who opposes peace efforts: 'This is not a religious state -- it's not the church that is that is determining state policies in Cyprus, but my party which received 53 percent of the vote.' It will be difficult, but we might have a settlement this time since we have pro-solution politicians on both sides in Cyprus."

TV News:

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CNN Turk

Domestic News

- The Turkish General Staff (TGS) said in a statement on its webpage the Turkish and Russian naval commanders met aboard a Turkish frigate in the Black Sea to discuss the recent developments in the region.
- Batman's Kurdish mayor Huseyin Kalkan has been sentenced to a one-year prison term on charges he spread PKK propaganda on the Copenhagen-based Roj TV.
- One soldier is killed in skirmish with the PKK terrorists in the Black Sea province of Giresun. Two others were killed in Bingol.

International News

- The Iranian chief of staff said the Iranian air forces would hold a wide-scale exercise "to display the ability and strength of those defending Iran's sky."
- Iraqi PM Nuri al-Maliki said a draft security deal between Washington and Baghdad on the status of U.S. forces in Iraq will be submitted to parliament within 10 days.
- A mosque frequented by Turks was attacked in the town of Obernai near Strasbourg in France.

WILSON